

# Guys Don't Retreat. [Or Do They?]

## Using Immersive & Weekend Retreat Experiences To Impact The Souls of Men

*"Life moves pretty fast.  
If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it."  
Ferris Bueller (1986)*

Life in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is busy. There are meetings to attend, calls to make, yard work to do, job demands that take up the daytime hours, family demands that take up evenings and weekends, sports to watch, and the ubiquitous daily tasks of life such as laundry and grocery shopping. Men wedge in civic responsibilities, dutifully attend church, coach a team, serve on committees, and maybe get around to the honey-do list once in a while.

Men push off soul care due to distractions and other well-intentioned demands that take priority. When an opportunity for soul care arises, such reading through Scripture or a devotional, listening to a podcast, or even reading the material for the weekly men's group, it tends to be rushed through, and it is consumed or checked off the list, sinking into the knowledge base of the brain, but never getting the chance to sink further into the heart.

It is not difficult to encourage and model best practices to the men in most churches; it is terrifically difficult to help men connect the head-knowledge of God to the heart-knowledge relationship with God, which then flows into missional living, which then reaches more men with the Gospel.

## TAKING IT DEEPER

There is a great market for religious experiences in today's culture; but there is often little enthusiasm for giving up more than 2-3 hours for an event that is hosted by a men's ministry. Very few local ministries can compete with the entertainment factor that our culture has conditioned men to expect.

Men's ministries have realized that they need to get men away from the milieu of their day-to-day routine. There have been many different movements over the years; from revivals to retreats, wilderness trips to arena gatherings... all of which are wrapped around an event or a speaker. It is assumed that the keynote, or the musician, or the location will attract men, and if men are in the seats, then they will absorb the Gospel-centered message that is presented.

Men's retreats are a trusty fallback event. Leaders obtain a retreat curriculum, identify a teacher, reserve a facility, and sign guys up; resulting in a 2-day Bible study that may-or-may-not impact the men where they are presently at in their spiritual journey. Alternatively, a retreat is filled with superficial "guy friendly" activities resulting in men going home physically exhausted, and spiritually empty. At the end of the day, neither of these models is being a good steward to the sacrifice of time that men give up to attend a weekend.

So how does a men's organization honor men's time... while simultaneously allowing them to slow down for a 44-hour experience, and let the Holy Spirit work in mighty ways?

Lutheran Men in Mission suggests a new model for impacting the souls of men through a weekend experience called ***One Year to Live***.

## ONE YEAR TO LIVE

The name ***One Year to Live*** sounds like ominous news. What does it mean? It is an exciting retreat model intended for men who want to be challenged to grow in faith as it offers a fresh design that includes follow-up small group sessions.



**One Year to Live** is a strategy encouraging men to seriously look at their lives, make significant decisions about their spiritual journey, and work with other men to hold one another accountable for those decisions.

**One Year to Live** is not for every man. It is for those men who want to take a serious look at their lives and who are willing to put everything on the line for Jesus Christ.

## THE BACK STORY

In April of 2006, LMM asked one of their partners, Lyman Coleman, and his team from the *La Mancha El Soul Foundation*, to take their professional and personal experience of 40 years and produce a new retreat model for men.

Whatever the end result looked like, it had three foundational criteria beyond connecting men to Christ:

- 1) It had to be life changing
- 2) It had to be a lay lead experience
- 3) It had to be Biblical, Creedal, & Sacramental

Since 2006, there have been over 30 events hosted in 10 states, with new men participating in new states every year.



## WHY IT WORKS

The retreat is successful because it's designed for men. It is peer oriented, not expert oriented. It is not centered on information but is oriented on the process, that is, it is a structured series of conversations to help men explore who they are. All small group leaders are former participants. All event leaders are former participants and small group leaders. So, the system creates its own leadership. Requiring leaders to be event veterans builds trust between the participants and the leaders. Group leaders are role models in helping participants to open up by sharing their life challenges, which fosters an environment for participants to open up and share their challenges.

## A STRUCTURED APPROACH TO CHANGING LIVES

Although this retreat follows the story of Jacob, it is not a Bible study or singing Kumbaya around the campfire. It is not about getting fixed by an analyst or lectured by an authority. It is regular guys helping other regular guys sort out their lives in a structured way. Participants learn what's really important to them, what's been holding them back, and they leave with a one-year plan centered on how they would



live their lives if they had one year to live.

The retreat is not a cookie cutter approach, looking identical every weekend. There is a consistent framework, such as limiting the weekend to a maximum of 40 men to ensure a personal experience, as well as maintaining a minimum ratio of lay-leaders to participants. The local host team identifies a

community and facility, and depending on factors such as facility, weather, and local culture, add local flavor to ensure that the experience does not come off as an “off the shelf” resource or event.

Participants arrive Friday evening to a hearty meal with their fellow participants, power down their electronic devices, and immerse themselves in a weekend of guided reflection. Departure occurs on Sunday early afternoon.

During the 2-3 months following the event, there is a follow-up program for participants that will deepen their walk with Jesus Christ and strengthen bonds between the men in their area.

It often takes early planning to ensure that men are able to block their schedule to attend a 44-hour experience such as **One Year to Live**. Based on this, retreat dates are set typically 6+ months in advance to minimize conflicts. It also takes a personal invitation, and a willingness to attend with another man or a group from their community. It is recommended that if a group of men are interested in a retreat of this type, that they attend one, with the goal of bringing it back to their community.

One of the hard parts about explaining the **One Year to Live** experience is that the activities and discussions over the weekend remain esoteric to the men who have participated. As participants return to their lives and congregations and are asked what occurred, the men are asked to steer discussion to the outcomes of participation in this experience instead of the details of what occurred during the weekend.

## OUTCOMES

A critical question frequently raised is that since this appears to be just another men's retreat, what is the benefit of **One Year To Live** and why should someone participate? Is **One Year To Live** just another

retreat? Those who have participated would say NO. While it is a 44-hour retreat with men, Matthew 7:16 reminds us, "By their fruit you shall know them" ... the fruit (i.e. outcomes) from this experience continues to show that God is using this experience in deeper and more impactful ways than the original designers and planners ever hoped. It does draw men into God's presence and, as Hebrews 12:2 tells us, helps men to set their eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

## Outcomes From Participants Turned Leaders

"Retreats with this format change lives because it teaches men to lead with courage, serve with compassion and give hope to others. Men begin to understand that they can do this by rejecting passivity, accepting responsibility and sharing their experience, strength and hope with others." Mike Maulick goes on to say, "At some point in my life I have been those things, but not with consistency or conviction. There were things buried deep inside of me, known and unknown, that were keeping me from doing that." As a result of his participation in the retreat, Maulick says, "Men in the church have approached me to ask how I deal with things, for example, a relationship at home. I share my experience with them. They're drawn to what appears to be a change in me. I don't know that until I ask, but the response is relatively consistent, 'I've seen a change in you. I see how you interact with others, and I see how you interact with your family, and it appears to be different'."

"Our congregation is full of men in their 20s, 30s and 40s who are yearning for a spiritual connection with Christ and with their brothers in the church" recounts Todd Little. "This new ministry offers a way to be adventurous and courageous, while at the same time being spiritual, genuine and vulnerable. This is truly an experience that helps us men be the husbands, fathers and friends that God intends us to be!"

"I have not seen anything that brings a man to deeper faith and produces men who take more responsibility in their families and congregations than the One Year to Live retreat and follow up. Since 2006, when the LMM leadership pilot-tested this retreat, dozens of retreats have been conducted, with repeated events in Colorado [where it was created], Nebraska, Wisconsin, and the Carolinas. As more men are equipped, it is spreading to other areas." - Doug Haugen



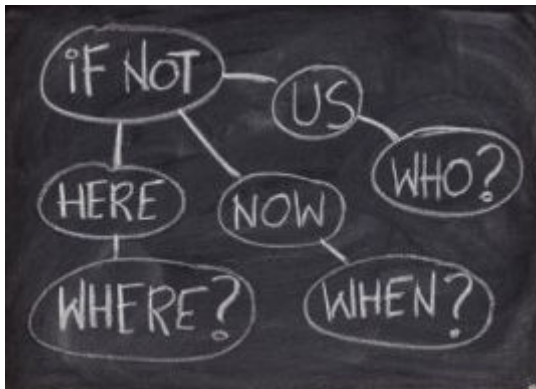
## Outcomes From Participants

*"I believe that most men desire authentic man relationships and may have even experienced those types of relationships in high school, college or maybe when they first started working. However, it is very common for men to lose those relations after marriage, children, and careers take over their lives, but that does not mean they still do not yearn for those authentic relationships with other men that they had so many years ago. The OYTL retreat not only shows that there are other men also interested in authentic relationships, but these relationships are modeled for you and you are shown how you can cultivate such relationships. I also tell men who have not been to the retreat, that at the retreat you will*

learn how God has absolutely been active in your life in the past, and how, in concrete ways, God can and will be a part of your life in the future.”

“As a man, I find it easy to over think life and attempt to control outcomes. To be the helper and not the helped, as that would be a sign of weakness, or so society would have me believe. The truth is, everyone has a story and has buried pain somewhere along the way and men are no different. The OYTL retreat allowed me to not only realize how much pain I buried, but also how to accept healing through the word of God and communion with other holy men. In essence, my faith has deepened, become more personal, and has greater meaning in my life. Not only that, I now have a very strong channel of support through my Brothers in Christ. If you are on the fence sitting there reading this, don't waste another minute over thinking about going to one of these retreats. If it feels uncomfortable, that's a fantastic place to start!”

## GETTING INVOLVED



Men's lives are busy. If an experience is felt to be more of an obligation than an opportunity, the Holy Spirit has little room to work. **One Year to Live** is not for everyone. It is for those men who want to take a serious look at their lives and who are willing to put everything on the line for Jesus Christ.

Men need to step outside their comfort zone. Retreats are often the last thing many men want to do, as it evokes images of bunk beds, cold showers, and being vulnerable.

Guys overlook the opportunity for soul care and making space to let God fill their cup to overflowing, which results in missional living. Men consider retreats to be obligatory “got to” events, rather than a “get to” opportunity, and Lutheran Men in Mission's goal is to change that paradigm. This is exactly why **One Year To Live** was created.

Choose to make the investment in your spiritual journey by coming and experiencing the excitement around this retreat model.

Bottom Line – God is using the **One Year To Live** retreat format to impact the souls of men! Join us!

## TO FIND OUT MORE

Information on event dates can be found on the website at [www.lutheranmen.org](http://www.lutheranmen.org) and in the quarterly *Foundations* newsletter.

Be sure and ask Lutheran Men in Mission where the next **One Year To Live** retreat will be held in your area and how to produce a groundswell of enthusiasm for retreating with a purpose.

# ABOUT

## Lutheran Men in Mission

[www.LutheranMen.org](http://www.LutheranMen.org)

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**Lutheran Men in Mission** is a 501(c)(3) ministry with and to men in the Lutheran church and beyond. We work to strengthen men's Christian faith, relationships, witness and service in their homes, congregation and communities.

**Our Mission** is, by God's grace, to build men's faith, relationships and ministry through men's events, the resources we produce and ongoing leadership development.

**Our Vision** is that every man have a growing relationship with Jesus Christ through an effective men's ministry in every congregation.

**Our Commitment** is to assist every congregation in establishing an effective, life changing men's ministry.

